

University of Hawai'i National Foreign Language Resource Center Advisory Board Meeting Final Report: 2006-2010

On May 19-21, in Honolulu, the board met and was briefed by staff on all of the major initiatives carried out by the Center over the preceding four years and by university administrators, faculty, and other staff who represented other university units with which the Center has been collaborating during the grant period. It must be said immediately that the board was unanimously very impressed with the high quality and important contributions already made by the Center's activities, by the degree of commitment shown by the University of Hawai'i to the goals reflected in the Center's activities, and by the plans for future work.

As at the beginning of the grant period, board members are impressed with the focus of the Center on, among other important topics, the languages and language education of Asia and the Pacific Basin, as represented in part by its decision to have an advisory board with members who specialize in regions of Asia and its willingness to implement earlier recommendations of that board. In addition, as has been the case throughout the four years of this grant period, the board was most appreciative of the willingness of all Center staff to engage in open discussion of their efforts. A handful of people are accomplishing a great deal of highly valuable work. Particularly noteworthy to the board are the center's strong efforts at outreach to and collaboration with a number of local and national organizations that are also dedicated to improving foreign language education in the US, for example, ADFL, ACTFL, other LRCs, the other Title VI centers on the UH campus, and other UH academic departments and centers.

In keeping with the spirit of openness and innovation shown by the Center in all of its efforts, the board makes the following observations.

The Center's work in language documentation, language program evaluation, distance education, professional development of teachers, and pragmatics in second language learning are highly innovative and significant and have established the Center as a leader on national and international levels as well as within the state of Hawaii. The Center's work represents the cutting edge of our knowledge in those areas. Moreover, the Center's commitment (with support from the University and, in several cases, other institutions) to host international conferences and workshops and to publish refereed monographs on these topic areas has ensured broad dissemination of information.

Also in the area of dissemination, the board praises the Center's successful launch, in co-sponsorship with the U.H. Press, of the major new journal of *Language Documentation and Conservation*, and its commitment to continuing to host a bi-annual conference on that increasingly critical topic in February 2011. As noted in an article in the journal *Computational Linguistics* (September 2009) on the topic of the first such conference in 2009, "The buzz among the participants was that we were at the start of something big, ... part of a significant and growing community dedicated to supporting small languages together."

The board furthermore wishes to recognize the efforts of the Center in continuing to co-sponsor two other important online journals that otherwise would not have a home: *Reading in a Foreign Language* and *Language Learning Technology*. We compliment LLT, especially, for the recent international recognition of its high quality. The board

continued to note, however, that the concerns of Asian and other Less Commonly Taught Languages continue to be largely unrepresented in these two journals. This fact was expressly admitted by the two editors of *LLT*, who told the board that they had experienced difficulty in attracting articles on other languages, and they sought advice from the board in helping them attract more such representation in the articles, but the lack characterizes both journals. If anything, it is more obvious in the journal *Reading in a Foreign Language (RFL)*, which has tended to focus primarily on speakers of other languages learning to read English (or, occasionally, another Western European language.) In that context, the following issues continue to be significant.

- Neither editorial board currently includes scholars with expertise in education in non-Indo-European languages. This is especially problematic for *Reading in a Foreign Language*; it seems to us, because of the rapidly expanding scholarship and research in the reading (and assessment of reading) of such languages as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Hebrew, Hindi, Finnish, and others. Close attention to the composition of the editorial boards and in the selection of article reviewers, so as to try to include scholars working on some of the priority languages specified under Title VI, would almost certainly help in expanding the language scope of the journals.
- The editors of the journals and the Center leadership might also actively seek contributions through contact with professional associations like NCOLCTL, COTSEAL, CLTA, AATJ, AATA, ACTR/AATSEEL to expressly invite participation and involvement from their membership. In addition, inviting reports on the progress of innovative new FL programs in these languages, such as the Language Flagship programs, would seem very promising. For example, the editors of the *RFL* have planned a special issue in 2013 on the teaching and learning of advanced reading in less commonly taught languages--a wonderful idea--and it appears to the board that beginning focused solicitation for relevant monographs now would greatly increase the likelihood of obtaining them.
- An additional aspect of this issue was discussed by the board: the fact that few if any of the less commonly taught languages present the numbers of enrollments that are typical of English as a Second Language or Spanish and that thereby enable the kinds of quantitative empirical studies found in such journals as *TESOL Quarterly*. Moreover, there may be fewer LCTL scholars who have experience conducting statistically driven empirical studies or in reporting research that focuses on case studies. The Center might, thus, consider ways to strengthen research in priority languages by offering workshops similar to those that the LLT editors have offered at AAAL, CALICO, and SLRF in recent years at additional conferences or online to assist scholars in these languages to develop the needed skills in identifying research questions, designing research protocols and writing up results.

In the four years of the grant, the Center has taken impressive steps to improve the dissemination of information about the work of this Center and the other 14 centers. The adoption of print-on-demand technology has made it possible to provide at very low cost any of the excellent volume-length monographs developed by the Center, such as the 2010 volume on *Research Among Learners of Chinese as a Foreign Language* and 2009 volumes on program evaluation in college foreign language education and on *Second Language Teaching and Learning in the Net Generation*. At the same time, the

Center has made available, online at no cost to the user through the U.H. Library Digital Repository, 334 of its documents developed earlier, and it has put video recordings of programs of advice to teachers on its website for direct access. In addition, Center staff took a leading role in re-designing the common LRC web portal maintained by CLEAR at MSU and updating the common database so that users can better locate and access work done by all 15 of the national Title VI Language Resource Centers, which has been of great benefit to professionals in the field.

Despite these impressive improvements, however, it appeared to the board that the Center needs to extend its approaches to communicating with non-professionals who are nonetheless very interested in language learning and/or teaching. One of the board members, Mary Hammond, pointed out how much her organization makes use of the different social networking Internet programs, like Facebook and You-tube, to attract interested casual Web browsers to information and to programs offered by the organization. Something like this would appear to be a desirable next step for the Center.

In closing this brief report, the board wishes once again to express unanimously its deep appreciation of the warm aloha, hospitality and support provided by center personnel, and also of the intellectually stimulating quality of all of the presentations. The opportunities to meet and converse with the Dean of the College (and hear his passionate support for the Center's work), with chairs of several U.H. departments and centers, and with the new Hawaii State Supervisor of Foreign Language Education were also most revealing and valuable. In every respect, the staff's welcoming generosity and efficiency were superb and went far beyond the scope of regular duties. All of us feel that we have benefited professionally and personally by the opportunities given us to learn about the work of the Center and the visions of its leadership

Mahalo nui loa!

Robert J. Bickner

Mary Hammond

Frederick H. Jackson

Madeline Spring

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